

INSPIRE Academy

Churchill Avenue, Silverbank, Chatham, Kent ME5 0LB

Inspection dates

5–6 June 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders at all levels have raised expectations, improved teaching and transformed this school.
- Pupils are taught well and make good progress. They are focused on learning, doing well and looking forward to the future.
- Leaders have made sure that they have appointed strong teachers and support staff who have the right qualities to improve pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Pupils' behaviour improves while they are at the school. They reflect on their mistakes, look outside of themselves and, increasingly, think of others before themselves.
- Pupils are kept safe in school through staff vigilance, leaders' expert knowledge and excellent relationships with other services that protect pupils.
- The school is an orderly and structured environment, which supports pupils' welfare and learning.
- Parents value the difference the school makes to their children. Parents also benefit from the extra care and guidance that they receive from leaders and staff. The school is making a positive impact on family life beyond the school gate.
- Members of the advisory board have ensured that the school's progress out of special measures has been solid and sustainable. The school has drawn on the right level of support from the expertise and experience of leaders and staff throughout the academy trust.
- The school's work to improve pupils' independent reading skills is at an early stage. While there have been rapid improvements in pupils' reading and spelling ages, some pupils are not yet confident readers and writers.
- Pupils' spiritual and cultural awareness is not promoted as strongly as their social and moral development. Until recently, there have not been enough opportunities for pupils to participate in cultural events and celebrations during the school year.
- The school's history, geography and religious-education programmes are not as strong as they are in English, mathematics and other subject areas.
- While there has been a steady improvement in pupils' attendance, including significant increases for individual pupils, overall attendance is still below national figures.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that pupils increase their confidence in and enjoyment of reading and that they make rapid gains in their communication skills, spelling, writing and comprehension.
- Improve the programme of study in humanities, including history, geography and religious education, ensuring that it is as interesting and engaging as the other academic and vocational subjects.
- Ensure that the curriculum and school routines include more opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual awareness and cultural understanding.
- Reduce rates of avoidable persistent absence for individuals, and further improve overall attendance, so that they are in line with national figures.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- School leaders' concerted efforts, resilience, trust in each other and focus on pupils being at the heart of the school, have raised expectations. Staff, in turn, have felt supported and motivated. They work tirelessly and openly as an effective team.
- The school has been through some challenging times, with changes in leadership and delays to the construction of the new building. However, these setbacks have not slowed the pace of improvement or distracted senior staff from their core purpose of improving the school for the good of the pupils.
- The school has flourished with the right balance of leaders. Stalwart staff at the heart of the school have maintained their dedication to the pupils. In addition, new and returning staff have joined the school, determined to raise expectations and improve teaching and behaviour.
- The headteacher makes sure that other senior leaders take full responsibility for decisions in their different areas. Leaders and staff are fully accountable for the impact that they make, but all feel that the senior leaders and board members take care of their well-being. The whole school is now fully focused on learning and working towards better outcomes.
- Pupils, too, have many opportunities to develop their own skills as leaders. They have a stake in the school's improvement and increasingly regard the school as somewhere that they can succeed.
- The current curriculum is devoted to meeting pupils' needs and ensuring that they leave the school able to take up employment or college places. There is a sensible focus on English and mathematics, but pupils also benefit from studying science and accredited vocational courses. Topics and programmes of study always give pupils something new to think about. In this way, they are encouraged to be less self-centred and are supported to weigh up options, use their reasoning skills and consider different points of view.
- Leaders are rightly committed to providing pupils with the same experiences as their peers in the mainstream, but more recently introduced subjects, such as history, geography and religious education, are not as well established.
- School leaders and staff wisely ensure that pupils get the chance to learn about right and wrong. Leaders are not afraid to present pupils with challenging ideas and unfamiliar lifestyles in order to give pupils a more rounded and tolerant perspective on society.
- Social opportunities are built into the school day and curriculum. Pupils' conversations and discussions are encouraged and valued, including during lunch and breaktimes and when extra support and counselling are needed. Because behaviour has improved, pupils are building up the usual kinds of relationships that might be seen in mainstream classrooms. For example, pupils listen properly to each other's views and they take turns. Pupils clearly understand the key concepts of respect, justice, the rule of law and democracy.

- While school leaders have understandably been concentrating on getting out of special measures, opportunities for pupils to reflect and consider more spiritual aspects of their thoughts and feelings are less evident. During an unsettled time, it has been hard for the school to celebrate different cultures and commemorate regular occasions during the cycle of the school year. Now that the school is more stable and secure, leaders are in a good position to establish events that will support pupils' deeper personal development and character.
- Many pupils have vulnerabilities and difficulties, including those who are disadvantaged. Through effective use of pupil premium funding, together with additional school funds, disadvantaged pupils are catered for well. In all cases, these pupils are doing as well as, and often better than, their non-disadvantaged peers.
- The school has shrewdly drawn on the expertise of the trust's other schools to support its improvement. In turn, as the school is improving, leaders have been able to offer something back in terms of expertise. School leaders have also looked outwards to other schools and academy trusts, in order to review outstanding provision, which has helped to raise expectations.
- The school has improved its reputation in the area and with the local authority. Numbers have increased, in spite of the previous special measures designation. For some parents and pupils, Inspire Academy has become the school of choice in the area because of its leadership, nurturing atmosphere and focus on learning.

Governance of the school

- Throughout the school's time in special measures, the advisory board has not wavered from asking challenging questions about the impact of school leaders and what is working well in the school. Members of the advisory board have considerable experience in school improvement, which has undoubtedly bolstered the school's progress.
- Members diligently carry out their statutory obligations regarding child protection, use of pupil premium funding and safer recruitment, while keeping a crucial focus on the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- The board has been further strengthened with new members, drawn from a range of professions, including education representatives from neighbouring schools and the local authority.
- Advisory board members visit the school frequently and supply incisive, evaluative reports to board meetings. In this way, members possess a thorough understanding of the rate of improvement and what needs to happen next, while fostering good working relationships with leaders, staff and pupils.
- The board is rightly looking to the future and the establishment of a substantive governing body in order to take the school to the next stage of its development. In spite of the challenges of the disappointing building programme, the school has remained in a secure financial position. The tenacity of the trust and the persistence of the work of the executive headteacher have enabled the advisory board, headteacher and other senior leaders to focus wholeheartedly on the pupils and the quality of their experience in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) and her team of support staff are steadfast in their duties to keep pupils safe. No concerns are overlooked or dismissed as being trivial or insignificant. As the DSL says, 'when it's wrong, it's wrong and we do something about it'. However, leaders are realistic and know only too well the challenges of keeping vulnerable pupils safe from risk. During recent times, leaders in the school have calmly faced some increasingly complex safeguarding situations, with resilience and determination.
- The DSL and her team work closely and productively with parents. Information about safeguarding topics and relevant risks to pupils is brought to parents' attention in the school's regular coffee mornings. Pupils are also taught about these topics and are therefore being helped to look after themselves as they grow up and go out into the adult community.
- All record-keeping is stored securely and provides a helpful history of relevant concerns to support the school's work with other agencies.
- The school's approach to safer recruitment meets all requirements. All reasonable action is taken to prevent unsuitable adults from working in the school.
- The DSL has forged strong working relationships with leaders of other services that protect children. Within the school, the DSL and her team work closely with leaders and staff who are responsible for pupils' behaviour and attendance. In this way, staff gain a completely rounded picture of any risks that pupils may encounter.
- Leaders have also made sure that pupils are taught about taking risks in a way that is suitable for their age, abilities and confidence. For example, where appropriate, older pupils are supported to make their own way to school rather than continuing to rely on taxi transport. In this way, pupils get used to a more everyday way of travelling and managing time.
- Safeguarding does not stand still in this school, and there are no complacent attitudes. The DSL thinks ahead to what staff and pupils will need and makes sure that there is a planned calendar of training to keep everyone up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment in most subjects and areas in the school are good and improving. Teachers' questioning typically helps pupils to think. In every lesson, sequence and topic, there is something new or challenging for pupils to think about, discuss and remember for next time.
- Teachers and support staff rightly pay attention to introducing new topics that pupils may have missed because of being out of education. In addition, staff make sure that pupils are given sufficient time to practise what they have been working on in the current topic or subject.

- Another common and successful thread is the school's focus on improving pupils' communication, including their verbal reasoning, 'reading between the lines' and empathising with other people. Teachers take every opportunity to remind pupils to consider the opinions of others and, in particular, to listen and to think before they argue against or agree with any particular point of view.
- Pupils enjoy contributing in lessons more than previously. Occasionally, they are over-enthusiastic and less disciplined than might be desirable. However, they do not intend to be unruly. Instead, they are trying hard to take part, answer questions and have their voices heard.
- Teachers swiftly act on pupils' responses. They skilfully make sure that there are resources that can quickly be distributed to stretch pupils who need more to think about and practise. In addition, teachers closely scrutinise pupils' understanding and pursue their misconceptions with patience and dedication until they get it right.
- A flexible blend of approaches helps to support pupils who are finding it difficult to settle, including use of the speech and language therapist's expertise, and judicious support from the drama therapist. Teaching assistants support pupils very well in and out of classrooms and work seamlessly with the teachers to promote learning. Teaching assistants rarely scribe pupils' work, and staff rightly believe that pupils should be working harder than the adults in the room, so pupils are expected to attempt tasks on their own.
- Nevertheless, pupils are confident that teachers and adults will help them to improve. Pupils are prepared to admit that they are struggling, are keen to ask for assistance, and are increasingly able to make use of the resources and extra help on offer. Their books and folders clearly show commitment to improving their work and learning from their mistakes. Pupils also work productively and purposefully with and alongside each other.
- School leaders have introduced a greater focus on improving pupils' communication, reading and writing skills, including programmes of extra help with phonics. Although pupils' reading, spelling and comprehension skills are improving rapidly, it is early days, and pupils have a lot of ground to make up.
- As teaching and learning have improved, leaders have identified that pupils could handle more challenging topics and tasks in history, geography and religious education.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are beginning to be more confident learners and look optimistically to a future where their hopes and dreams may be fulfilled. Pupils have such positive attitudes because of the security that they feel and the trust that they place in the teachers and staff who help them.
- Pupils are increasingly proud of their achievements, whether these are awards for an accredited course, or the 'day sheets' on which their reward points are recorded. This simple system of collecting points for good work and conduct is highly valued by pupils

and easily managed by staff. At long last in the school's history, pupils feel confident about saying that they want to do well. They do not have to wait too long to have their achievements celebrated, and can rely on the school's fair and consistent weekly routine of celebration assemblies and reports to parents. As a consequence, pupils are building up more self-esteem and belief that they can improve.

- Pupils told inspectors that deliberate bullying is rare, but when there is unacceptable 'banter' that goes too far and becomes hurtful and destructive, staff deal with it well. Over time, pupils are much less likely to use derogatory or abusive language against each other or their teachers. They sometimes forget themselves when annoyed with themselves, or let swearing 'slip out' in a habitual way. However, leaders are adamant about challenging bad language and never just let it go without reminding pupils. Pupils therefore know what is acceptable in the school environment and what is not.
- On this inspection, pupils were more accepting of visitors and wanting to show themselves at their best. They keep their work neatly and their books and folders are a clear testament to their progress and achievements. For many pupils, their accumulation of work is a precious commodity. For example, they were keen to get their books back from the inspection work scrutiny. This was not because pupils were ashamed of their work, but because they were anxious to keep up and not run the risk of losing their books.
- In addition, classrooms and corridors are now looking more attractive and celebratory because displays stay in place and are looked after by pupils.
- Pupils themselves have a definite voice in the school's development. The school council is just one way in which the school is looking to the future and seeing itself as a place of learning for the long term.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have developed a much improved behaviour management system, in which high expectations of conduct and courtesy are the norm. The school's approach to improving behaviour also encourages high expectations of staff conduct, manners and the way that they speak to pupils and each other. As a result, the atmosphere in and out of classrooms is calmer, more controlled and not at all tense.
- Pupils are lively and cheerful and let off steam as safely and appropriately as any other children and teenagers at break and lunchtime. They invent their own safe and well-organised games and join in or watch supportively and with genuine appreciation.
- Pupils are learning how to conduct themselves in a respectful and considerate way on more formal occasions. During the inspection, it was noted that pupils listened politely and participated thoughtfully and enthusiastically to a visiting speaker talking about internet safety.
- Serious incidents of disrespectful, uncontrolled or physically dangerous behaviour are declining, as are instances of restrictive physical intervention or exclusions. Staff are better able to de-escalate situations when pupils' emotions are running high, and they are, therefore, better able to prevent incidents getting out of hand. Leaders have introduced a stricter and more helpful system of recording and reflecting on serious

incidents. Pupils' and staff's views are taken into account more systematically, with lessons learned about what could help to improve pupils' behaviour in the future.

- Pupils' improved behaviour has led to a significant decrease in damage to the building and furnishings. Pupils understand that their actions have consequences, both positive and negative. This, in turn, is helping to ensure that there is more money to spend on appropriate rewards for pupils' good behaviour and learning.
- Leaders have wisely introduced an improved system to help pupils to manage their emotions themselves. In particular, the speech and language therapist helps pupils to find the right words to express how they feel and what helps them to calm down. In addition, leaders are now closely tracking pupils' 'behaviour competences' to pinpoint the most useful strategies and celebrate when pupils succeed.
- Attendance for many individual pupils improves significantly while they are at the school. Leaders' tenacious communication and pursuit of poor attendance helps families who have struggled to maintain acceptable levels of attendance. There are many success stories for individual pupils who were non-attenders in their mainstream or previous schools.
- The overall figure for attendance has improved year on year and is now over 12% above what it was when the school was placed in special measures. Nevertheless, leaders are rightly aware that attendance needs to improve further to meet national figures and that some pupils' poor habits of casual absence are proving hard to change.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils typically enter the school with large gaps in their education from having missed school. For some, their special educational needs and/or disabilities are major barriers to their achievement because they have difficulties with literacy, numeracy and retaining information. In addition, some pupils have difficulties controlling and regulating their behaviour because of their mental health needs. Notwithstanding these challenges, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress and are well prepared for employment or the next stage in their education.
- Examination results in 2017 were mixed. Overall, pupils did not meet their targets. This was largely because of weak teaching and lower expectations in the past. However, all pupils who left the school in 2017 went on to college places, vocational programmes or apprenticeships. All pupils went on to be in education, employment or training. The current Year 11 group are also assured of college, employment or training programmes post-16.
- Pupils leave the school with a range of appropriate qualifications, including English and mathematics at GCSE or entry level. Pupils also attain accredited qualifications in art and design, science and physical education. A number of pupils succeed in attaining BTEC National Diploma awards in vocational subjects, including home-cooking skills and construction.
- During the inspection, just as with any mainstream school during the summer term, pupils talked maturely about their upcoming examinations, revision and prospective

awards. Pupils value their achievements, whether these are GCSE, A-level courses, or level 1 programmes preparing them for the world of work.

- In mathematics, current pupils rapidly master number skills and calculations. Their books and folders demonstrate that they can attempt problems set out in different formats, including some complex word problems.
- Pupils are making tangible gains in science, with some having very little prior knowledge. They succeed in carrying out practical experiments and recording their findings accurately and precisely. In art, pupils increase their confidence and produce completed work that is of a high standard, comparing well with that found in mainstream schools. Some older pupils have had considerable success with art and are on course to study higher-level courses, including at university.
- Pupils also achieve well in vocational courses and the bespoke programmes delivered off-site. Those who participate in work experience, or attend college courses as part of their programme of study, make good progress towards employment or apprenticeships. Work experience providers frequently comment favourably on the positive work ethic and progress of pupils from the school.
- Pupils' progress in English is slower than in mathematics. Leaders know that in the past staff did not succeed in tackling pupils' difficulties with reading and writing. Previously, staff supported pupils with weak literacy skills, but did not get to the heart of their problems with basic reading and writing. Now that staff have a better idea of exactly what pupils' weaknesses are and have planned the right kind of extra help, pupils' reading, spelling and comprehension scores are rising. However, pupils remain reluctant readers and recent improvements to teaching have not had enough time to increase their confidence and fluency.
- It is encouraging that pupils are now studying a wide range of topics in history, geography and religious education. However, the standard of pupils' written work in these subjects is not as high as in more established subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	141005
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10038212

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Alastair Wilson
Headteacher	Mark Jordan (executive headteacher) Martyn O'Donnell (headteacher)
Telephone number	01634 827 372
Website	www.inspireacademy.org.uk
Email address	info@inspireacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 January 2016

Information about this school

- Inspire Academy is a special school catering for pupils who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. The school originally opened as a free school in September 2014. Following the last section 5 inspection, when the school was judged to require special measures, the school joined the Parallel Learning Trust, which operates similar provision in London and the South East.
- The school is currently governed by an advisory board, which reports to the academy trust. The executive headteacher is also the chief executive officer of the Parallel Learning Trust.
- The current headteacher joined the school in September 2017. Since the school was placed in special measures, there have been a number of other changes to leadership roles.

- Nearly all of the pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan. Some pupils have additional needs, including autistic spectrum disorder.
- There are more boys than girls in the school. A higher-than-average proportion of pupils are disadvantaged.
- Currently, there is a very small number of students of sixth-form age.
- A small number of pupils are on bespoke timetables. These pupils are taught off-site by members of staff from the school. A number of pupils attend vocational programmes and work experience as part of their study programmes at Mid-Kent College, North Kent College and Nacro Education in Chatham.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection began as the fourth special measures monitoring visit. At the end of the inspection, Her Majesty’s Inspector deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection because it was judged that the school no longer required special measures.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the advisory board, senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and a group of pupils.
- Inspectors visited a number of lessons and therapy sessions to observe pupils learning and talk to them about their work. They observed pupils in tutor time and at break and lunchtimes. An inspector visited an assembly presented by an outside speaker.
- An inspector met with three parents. There were too few contributions to the online survey, Parent View, but inspectors took into account the school’s own regular surveys of parents and also the views of parents obtained at previous monitoring visits.
- A sample of pupils’ work in English, mathematics, science, humanities, vocational studies and art was reviewed, alongside information about pupils’ attainment and progress.
- The school’s arrangements for safeguarding were scrutinised. In addition, inspectors reviewed information about pupils’ attendance and behaviour.
- Leaders’ improvement plans and evaluation of the school’s performance were considered, together with minutes from the advisory board meetings.
- The school currently caters for a very small number of sixth-form students. The quality of the school’s provision for students of this age is incorporated into the main findings of this report.

Inspection team

Janet Pearce, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Ross Macdonald

Ofsted Inspector

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